Chapter 3: The Golden Horseshoe

Lisa Ohberg and Sarah Wakefield

Summary

- Local food initiatives abound in the region southwest of the GTA encompassing Hamilton, Halton, Brant and Haldimand: all regions in the study area had developed some sort of local food branding or local food map, most had a community food committee or council, most had a good food box program operating at the time of study and all had at least one farmers' market. Even counties with less developed local food networks were quickly increasing community mobilization and awareness at the time of this study.
- Emphasis is on: cross-sector collaboration, ever more public awareness and education, social justice for low-income cohorts and farmers, community and individual health and nutrition, unifying capacity of food, ecological sustainability, and community empowerment through food.
- Concerns are: lack of secure funding, lack of financial and physical accessibility of local food for consumers, lack of market access for producers, need for greater public awareness, declining local processing capacity, regulatory framework designed for the industrial model, and land use planning (food production in competition with other sectors).
- Identified needs are: more sustainable funding particularly for operational costs (e.g., staff), regional processing infrastructure, government and intuitional local procurement to support local farmers, more facilitation of knowledge sharing and communication between initiatives, and more supportive policy environment
- Regional characteristics are: climate favorable for mixed agriculture, a mix of sandy soils suitable for horticulture and clay soils better suited for livestock rearing and commodity cultivation, mostly rural and suburban settlement patterns, more densely-populated areas such as Hamilton and Halton Region in the north.

Background

This chapter summarizes the results of research conducted in Brant, Haldimand, Halton, and Hamilton, Ontario. These regions are located to the south and west of Toronto. Climatically they are well-suited to agriculture – if not quite so temperate as the adjacent region of Niagara – and are within easy driving distance of the large populations within the GTA and the City of Hamilton. As such, farmers in the area have access to a large consumer base.

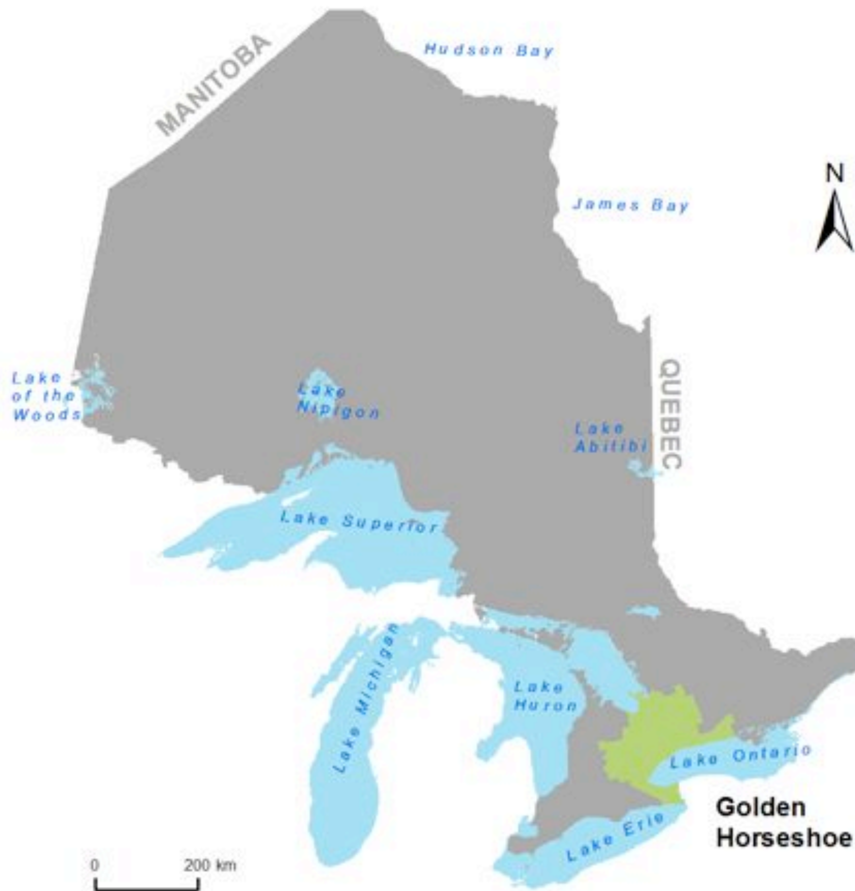

Figure 3.1: Map of Golden Horseshoe Region

There is considerable diversity within this area. Brant and Haldimand are large, primarily rural regions, with populations of less than 33,000 and 44,000 respectively. Brant is on the outer edge of the GTA commuter belt; some farmland is under pressure from suburban expansion (particularly around the City of Brantford). Brant is also home to the Six Nations of the Grand River first nation, which comprises a large land parcel to the southwest of Brantford. In addition, there are active Six Nations land claims outside of the reserve, including areas of Haldimand adjacent to the Grand River. Haldimand for the most part is free from farmland conversion pressures on a large scale, but is bordered on one side by Lake Erie (resulting in some intensification along the shoreline and the possibility of land use conflict).

Halton (pop: just over 400 000) and Hamilton (pop: just over 500,000), while still primarily agricultural in terms of overall land use, have large urban and suburban populations. Halton has, on average, one of the most affluent populations in Ontario, and includes substantial areas of commercial and light industrial land use, as well as serving as a ‘bedroom community’ for Toronto. Hamilton, in contrast, has long been a centre of heavy industry in Canada, but declines in the manufacturing sector have reduced employment in this area and have left urban Hamilton with some of the most geographically concentrated poverty in Ontario. Both Hamilton and Halton face

considerable farmland conversion pressures due to suburbanization, but these have been mitigated by Ontario's Greenbelt legislation, which protects most of Hamilton and Halton's remaining agricultural land from conversion (albeit at some cost to existing farmers' livelihood opportunities).

This is a mixed-farm region, with grain and oilseed, beef, and dairy operations predominant, but with a large number of farms growing vegetables, fruit, poultry, and a variety of specialty crops at a variety of scales. Much of the agricultural land in Haldimand consists of clay soils, which are better suited for livestock and dairy production than the sandy soils that lend themselves more easily to vegetable production in areas of Hamilton, and parts of Haldimand in the Dunnville area.

Participants

72 initial contacts were made in these regions, resulting in 33 interviews. Interviews were conducted with representatives from public health departments (5), emergency food access and (re)distribution agencies (4), producer associations (4), Community Supported Agriculture organizations (CSAs) (3), community-engaged academics (3), economic development officials (3), Good Food Box programs (3), Farm to School programs (2), other food-related community initiatives (2), a Community Health Centre (1), a farmers' market association (1), a native reserve community food program (1), and local branches of OMAFRA (2).

Common Accomplishments

Most regions within the study area had successfully created (or were in the process of creating) committees or coalitions of community stakeholders to begin dialogue and collaboration (e.g., the Halton Food Council, Brant Community Food Systems Coalition, Hamilton's Community Food Security Stakeholders Committee). These vehicles for networking, communication and partnership were seen as important to developing future work in this area. In addition, many new programs and initiatives related to local food have begun in recent years, and these programs have experienced rapid growth and success over a relatively short period of time. For example, the Hamilton Good Food Box program, which started in 2011, has been expanding rapidly. While it is impossible to estimate how many people were involved as employees, volunteers and clients/customers across these initiatives, it was clear that participation rates were steadily growing across categories – for instance, farmers' markets contacted in some regions reported having long wait-lists of new vendors who wished to rent permanent stalls.

A number of these initiatives were either planned or underway with the intention of creating opportunities to sell local produce 'locally'. However, many initiatives found that inter-regional trade between counties allows the scale and variety required for successful business operations (whether farmers' markets or CSAs) without losing the essence of local or posing insurmountable logistics and distribution barriers to medium and small scale enterprises. For example, the City of Hamilton and the Region of Niagara recently embarked on a joint investigation of the potential for a 'local food distribution

initiative' (including but not limited to a shared bricks-and-mortar local food terminal). In addition, Plan B, a Hamilton organic farm, not only sells its produce to consumers in Hamilton, Halton, and Toronto through its CSA and farmers markets, but also sources additional produce (to supplement their own on-farm production) from growers around southwestern Ontario. This approach recognizes the diversity of climatic and soil conditions within the region – it was a widely held view, for example, that growers in most of Hamilton had significantly different growing conditions than those in the tender fruit belt of Niagara, and so their time would be better spend producing food that made the best of local conditions rather than trying to compete with Niagara fruit (and further, that growers from Niagara and elsewhere with specialty product would be welcome in 'local' retail such as farmers' markets and specialty stores).

All four municipalities in the study area have undertaken some form of awareness-raising campaign for local food, from local food branding (Bountiful Brant, and Harvests of Haldimand) or a map of local farmers doing farm-gate sales (e.g., Hamilton Eat Local's Farm Map and Directory, and Halton Region's 'Simply Local' initiative). These efforts have been taken on by different actors in the different municipalities, with some led by municipal government departments, others by producer organizations, and still others by environmental organizations.

The local food initiatives in this region have identified some innovative ways to create financial sustainability and overcome logistical challenges. Interesting approaches include the 'bundling' of a low-cost or no-cost food initiative with a for-profit initiative (such as the planned development in Hamilton of a reduced-cost Good Food Box for low income households through profits from a 'gourmet' local food box available through workplaces); growers working together to enhance distribution efficiencies, create economies of scale, and provide a wider range of product options to consumers; and drawing on funding from charitable foundations and other sources to provide start-up resources for initiatives. Many of the programs in the area were initially funded through grants from foundations or other donors.

Common Challenges

The most prevalent challenge was the financial sustainability and self-sufficiency of the local food distribution initiatives being created. In many cases, it was noted that the initiatives were dependent on other organizations (often municipal departments or non-governmental organizations) for core funding to support their operations. While grant funding from foundations, etc., had been useful in the start-up phases, this funding was often one-time-only and did not support program sustainability over time. Thus, while there was funding available for new initiatives, expansion or change, there was limited funding for the continued operation and maintenance of successful pilot programs. Interviewees expressed frustration at the lack of continued funding opportunities to maintain their good work, as the funding structure is set up to support only new initiatives but not sustain existing ones unless they are expanding or implementing new programs.

The difficulty of sustaining existing initiatives and projects was seen as an even bigger and more important challenge. Given the current fiscal climate, there were few organizations that were in a position to assimilate initiatives – even those that were working well and having positive impacts – into their operating budgets once the initial funding period was over.

Some initiatives (particularly but not exclusively for-profit initiatives and social enterprises) were set up according to a business model that accounts for all the costs of production and distribution through the prices being paid for the products. However, it was noted that what consumers are willing (or able) to pay may not match the cost of production and distribution within the localized food system, limiting the potential consumer base for local food, and the ability for farmers and others in the food chain to develop sustainable livelihoods.

This was related to another central concern, that of labour and the reasonable remuneration of labour. Many of the local food distribution initiatives reported difficulties associated with paying people fairly for their work. Farmers reported routine self-exploitation, working long hours on the farm and in distribution-related activities (managing a website, staffing in a farm store, and participating in farmers' markets). Various other activities (such as good food box packing and gleaning) require large numbers of volunteers. In addition, most farmers interviewed reported having interns and volunteers such as WWOOFers[1] to help with labour-intensive activities such as weeding and harvesting. Most – although not all – of these workers live as well as work on the farm. While many workers receive minimal reimbursement for their labour (ranging from room – or sometimes a tent – and board only to minimum wage and above), farmers have difficulty providing these reimbursements out of their (already very minimal) profits. Similarly, food distribution organizations that rely on volunteers do so because there is no funding available to pay workers. Many volunteers and interns choose to participate because they enjoy it, learn valuable skills, and feel that they are making an important contribution to their community; at the same time, the inability of local food initiatives to provide suitable reimbursement for time worked is a key challenge within the sector.

Overall, many organizations reported being 'stretched thin' in trying to build an alternative food system and meet the needs of different stakeholders with extremely limited resources. Many organizations recognized that they are working on one piece of an important whole, and would like to participate more actively in addressing different needs (particularly, bridging urban and rural needs). However, they felt that while they share the broader goals and ideals of community food security, they do not have the resources to do even a small part of what would be required. For example, emergency food access organizations would love to provide local fresh fruits and vegetables to clients and thereby support local farmers, but they do not have sufficient resources, neither the money to make fruit and vegetable purchases, nor the time to track down and coordinate local donations. Similarly, while growers want to contribute to reducing food

[1] WWOOFers are volunteers recruited to work on farms around the world through an organization called World Wide Opportunities on Organic Farms. These volunteers work on the farm in return for "food, accommodation, and opportunities to learn about organic lifestyles" (WWOOF Canada, 2011).

insecurity in urban areas, they cannot make large donations of produce while they are struggling to make ends meet. Organizations feel they need to prioritize their original mandates first in that context, and so a more holistic approach to food systems is difficult.

Another common challenge was accessibility – both financial accessibility (being able to pay for food) and physical access to retail opportunities for farmers and consumers. In all of the study area, but in the area's urban centres in particular, it was noted that many people cannot afford adequate food, and that this is exacerbated for vulnerable populations such as newcomers. In urban areas, it was particularly difficult to access healthy and fresh (let alone local) food. However, farmers are in a cost-price squeeze, with the costs of their inputs (such as fuel and labor) increasing, and so cannot price food to make it affordable to the lowest income consumers. In addition, it was felt that it was not possible to charge a full-cost price for local food, because consumers, regardless of income, are used to a 'cheap food culture' that provides them with food at extremely low cost.

In terms of the physical accessibility of local food, it was noted that many urban consumers were unable or unwilling to travel to purchase food at a farm gate, a farmers' market, a good food box drop site, etc. This is often due to the lack of vehicle or public transit routes to the location, or it could be due to time constraints. Farmers also struggled to find time and resources to make deliveries to food box and school food programs, not to mention the additional time and resources required to be at a number of different farmers markets.

It was also noted that local food may be psychologically inaccessible and unfamiliar to consumers, particularly urban consumers, who may be unaware of the seasonal rhythms of the farm or the vagaries of local microclimates and soils, and expect food to be uniformly and consistently available throughout the year and from place to place.

A lack of local food procurement from the public and institutional level was also seen as a challenge – since procurement contracts can provide growers with long-term stability, the failure of large local institutions (universities, governments, etc.) to enter into procurement contracts – either directly or through wholesalers – with local growers was seen as problematic.

Other Common Themes

Many participants found the concept of 'food hubs' difficult to identify with, in the absence of a clear, generally recognized existing definition and examples. They felt they had little experience with what a hub might be or could look like, and were unsure of the extent to which their own activities constituted real food hubs. In particular, participants were unsure whether food hubs were primarily intended as mechanisms to generate markets for local farmers (e.g., CSAs), or whether they were intended to support local community food security (e.g., the Stop Community Food Centre model). They were also unclear about whether a food hub required a concrete location or could be a distribution system, such as an online ordering system. While a lack of conceptual clarity can allow

flexibility and inclusion, at the same time the range of activities being considered was baffling to many respondents. While all food hubs discussed had food access – in one way or another – as a central theme, discussions of access for whom, and with what goals in mind, elucidated major differences in perspective amongst participants.

As was noted earlier, the divide between social justice and agricultural/rural development goals was difficult to bridge. On the one hand, growers articulated a concern about social justice, but this was primarily focused on the growers themselves and their difficulties in securing a livelihood. Some growers expressed concerns that food hubs focusing on meeting the needs of low-income communities might feed people who were hungry, but would not create sustainable local food systems. They felt that there was a need to build local food systems by developing distribution relationships with consumers who could afford to pay a premium for local food, and then once initiatives are successful to start to identify ways those programs could be expanded to include low income consumers. On the other hand, those working in anti-hunger organizations felt that income insecurity, and the resulting food insecurity, needs to be addressed before they could contribute meaningfully to the development of sustainable local food systems.

At the same time, some of the more innovative programs in the study area were attempting to bridge this gap through approaches that attempt to enhance low income populations' ability to eat local right off the bat, in an attempt to solve both issues. These types of initiatives, however, were likely to depend heavily on volunteer labour (e.g., Good Food Boxes, gleaning) and on community-based self-provision of food (e.g., community gardens and fruit tree projects which, while important, do not contribute to rural development), and to rely on low-cost food (e.g., donations, food from the Toronto Food Terminal). It was noted that successful models exist in other areas that successfully combine the goals of rural development, sustainable agriculture, and social justice; however, projects in this area struggled to achieve them in concert. A fundamental question for the future, then, is to what extent these multiple goals can – or should – be pursued simultaneously, and how this relates to what a food hub is, or should be.

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Case Study 1: Grand River Community Health Centre (GRCHC)

Location: Brantford (Brant County), ON

Interviewees: Sarah Gill, Health Promoter and Gloria Ord, Community Garden Facilitator

Phone Interview (with Sarah Gill) July 11, 2011 (Lisa Ohberg), site visit August 17, 2011 (Lisa Ohberg)

Reviewed and Approved by Interviewees

Summary

- Community health centre with a food systems focus on health promotion
- Builds community capacity to manage their own food security programs by facilitating initiatives and transferring ownership to the community
- Since 2009, initiatives have included: the Community Garden Project, the Community Food Advisor Program, and the Community Food Systems Coalition

Overview

The Health Centre

The community health centre model of care combines clinical practice with health promotion and community development. Physicians, nurses, nurse practitioners, and health promotion and community development staff serve primarily priority populations and work in the community to address community health needs in a holistic way. The Grand River Community Health Centre (GRCHC) was created in 2009 after community stakeholders in health and social services identified a need for this model of care in Brantford.

The Health Centre has been involved in the Community Garden Project since the Centre's inception in 2009. The garden project is one way that the Centre's health promotion staff addresses the issue of community food security as a social determinant of health. Involvement in the garden project "led to Grand River really looking at and supporting food security as a major focal point in the work that we do in health promotion", says Gill. Two staff members dedicate their time to community food issues as a part of their health promotion portfolios, improving the Garden Project in the last two years and recently being involved in facilitating the creation of the community food systems coalition.

The Projects

The Community Garden Project was originally "created by community members and supported by the local Brant-Brantford Poverty Roundtable, "says Gill. The garden

created by that initiative was originally on leased private property. Gill explains that "having a social determinants of health focus", the GRCHC "saw a community garden as a way to be progressive on the food security landscape and therefore supported the lease of the private owner's land [on which the garden was built] so that the garden could be created". In the next year of the project the original garden's lease expired and the GRCHC took up the position of project manager. At this time the GRCHC decided they could manage the project and its resources more effectively by assuming the role of consultant, resource allocator, and educator "so that the community could create their own gardens", explains Gill. Ord, the Community Garden Facilitator is responsible for "resource allocation, the workshops, the teaching, [and] the liaison with the actual gardens", while Gill manages the program's administration and finances. "The onus is on the community to create the garden with our support," explains Gill. In their first year the project only worked with a single garden, but now supports 12 gardens and continues to support new gardens.

Through her work with the community garden project as an employee of the GRCHC, Gill became interested in community food security in Brant. As part of the requirements of her Master's degree in Health Promotion, completed part time via correspondence during her employment with the Health Centre, she researched and compiled a Community Food Continuum for Brantford and Brant County. The continuum document presents an environmental scan of all food related assets in Brant, organized along a continuum of short-term, emergency access needs, and long-term, food system sustainability needs. The continuum also identifies gaps at each stage. One of the gaps identified by the continuum was a "mobilization of community support through food systems networks".

The GRCHC's most recent food initiative is supporting the establishment of a group of stakeholders who are representative of community food needs at all stages in the continuum to begin a dialogue on community food issues in Brant. The group is referred to in this report as the Community Food Systems Coalition though the initiative is still in its infancy and the name has not yet been finalized. Stakeholders are still being identified and invited to the table. The group aims to define and discuss community food goals and work on action projects.

The Health Centre also facilitated the revitalization of the Community Food Advisor training program. Thirteen new community food advisors have been trained and join two long-time community food advisors to educate the community on healthy, nutritious and safe food practices.

Human Resources

The Grand River Community Health Centre's most important human resources are the employees who work on community food security issues, namely Ord and Gill. Ord's staff time is divided equally between client advocacy and work as the Community Garden Facilitator. As a full time health promoter, Gill is responsible for the rest of the Health Centre's community food initiatives: "the largest part of my portfolio is food security. This is one piece of a food security pie, I also manage the community garden project, I also manage the community food advisor project. So there is a bunch of food

system initiatives that we've initiated as part of that continuum that we're trying to fill gaps... as well as looking at the very long term and getting that facilitation along the way".

In addition to the dedicated staff at the GRCHC, Ord pointed out that the commitment of community members involved in the different food projects is paramount to their success: "The people that come to the table… there's a lot of dedication. There may not be a huge amount of people (although when they all get together there's a fair amount) but they're very dedicated as well to the project and seeing the project evolve".

Physical Infrastructure

At present the clinical and health promotion staff work in adjacent buildings due to renovations but, "in a year when our final building is done we will all be under one roof" says Gill. In the new space, clinical health practitioners will work side by side with health promotion staff in the same office space. This proximity facilitates conversation and knowledge sharing between clinical staff and health promotion staff about community health needs and issues.

Natural Resources

Although each community garden is responsible for its own creation and maintenance, the Health Centre has developed helpful partnerships with community businesses to provide resources such as seed and soil to gardens at lower costs. The Garden Project helps connect potential garden facilitators with such resources. The Garden Project, primarily through Ord (a seasoned gardener herself) provides gardeners with knowledge on organic gardening methods, which are promoted by the Health Centre.

Financial Resources

The Grand River Community Health Centre provides the salary for the 1.5 staff dedicated to food initiatives (comprised of Gill's employment as a health promoter and the half of Ord's staff time spent on Community Garden Facilitator duties). Although staff time is funded by the GRCHC, funding for the work related to the Community Garden Project is obtained from "outside resources from the GRCHC", explains Gill, including funding from the community, grants, and fundraising. This funding is used to provide workshops on various garden topics and to purchase supplies. When needed, the Community Garden Project will provide start-up monies to community gardens that come from these external funding sources or donations solicited from local businesses.

Community Resources

Some businesses in the community have played an active role by sponsoring the community garden program and providing funding or resources "McKenzie Seeds donated five hundred dollars worth of seeds; we had Lowes that came in and built several gardens for us, smaller companies that gave us the soil at a lesser cost and threw in the delivery free, and so all these kinds of things keep the cost [of supporting 12 community gardens] quite low", explains Ord.

The Community Food Continuum
As a part of her Masters degree requirements, Gill embarked on the environmental scan of the food system in Brantford and Brant County that resulted in the creation of the Community Food Continuum. Gill identified this document as a resource in itself in moving forward with the coalition and other food security initiatives: "doing some of the evidence-based work has really grounded the credibility of the work that we do, both within the community and with Grand River continuing to support it".

Policy and Program Resources

The GRCHC became interested in food security health promotion activities such as the Community Garden Project because the community health centre follows an alternative model of care that has a 'social determinants of health' focus. "Community Health Centres tend to come out of grassroots movements," explains Gill, and "it's a long road to actually get the community health centre started, but there was [support for this model] through the Minister of Health who made a commitment to increase the number of community health centres". Without the Ministry of Health committing to the Community Health Centre model, the Brantford community may not have been successful in their campaign to create a community health centre. This policy support for community health centres was crucial in creating an organization whose holistic view of healthcare lead it to focus on community food security, and that is able to provide sustainable staff and financial resources to these initiatives.

Desired Assets

The community food systems coalition is still in its infancy, and was still in the process of obtaining stakeholder input at the time of writing. Further representation from some community stakeholders was still desired including, for example, input from the municipality of Brant County and land use planners. This input will be sought as stakeholders continue to be identified in the ongoing process of developing a stakeholder profile.

Constraints/Overcoming Them

The Community Garden Project was originally structured in a way that "was not sustainable", Gill describes. However, by shifting the role of the project manager to one of education, consultation and resource allocation, the GRCHC was able to overcome this structural barrier and has successfully supported the creation and maintenance of many more gardens in the community.

With respect to the food systems coalition, Gill notes that the work is very heavily 'relationship-based', adding that she had built relationships with food stakeholders in the community when doing her prior research on the Community Food Continuum that made it easier to begin assembling a stakeholder profile for the coalition. One challenge this initiative faced at the time of writing, was that Gill's temporary maternity leave replacement must now begin building these stakeholder relationships and trying to begin a food security dialog. Gill noted that one way she attempted to preemptively overcome the constraints this temporary transition might bring was to actively seek out a temporary replacement staff member who had the capability to continue the task of building relationships with community members.

Having the coalition achieve small successes or tangible outcomes early on in order to maintain the support of the community stakeholders is a challenge that Gill anticipates in the future of the coalition. To overcome this, Gill has suggested that one of the coalition's (which the GRCHC facilitates but the stakeholders and participants are responsible for) first activities should be to identify a few priority community food needs and then work on action projects to address these needs.

Successes

In regards to the community garden project, Ord and Gill found that they could be more efficient and useful in a support role, rather than being responsible for running an individual garden. They attribute the project's current success to the fact that they "run on minimal funds to create multiple gardens in a year because the onus is on the community to create the garden".

Gill emphasizes that the key to success in all the food initiatives that the GRCHC is involved with is the ability for the GRCHC to assume the role of facilitator, but to allow the community to drive the initiatives: "The whole thing that underpins it, whether it's the community garden or the community food advisor program or the food systems coalition, is building capacity, you're just building it at different levels…Our role is that of stable facilitation of continuing to build capacity within the community so…you take [the community] to a certain point and then [the community] owns it and takes it further".

Relevance

When asked about how the GRCHC's experiences working with community food systems initiatives would be relevant to other organizations, Gill and Ord responded, "everything is relevant!" "If you want to do this work," Gill explains, "you're going to have to learn from other people's successes and challenges, and your community is going to have their own, but hopefully you can curtail some of the challenges up front, or you can bring foundational knowledge to a group".

The GRCHC clearly has some unique assets that have contributed to the success and sustainability of its community food systems initiatives. Notably among these are the sustainable funding for dedicated staff time to address food security issues and the rich human resources provided by the particular staff that currently work on GRCHC's food portfolio. The staff dedication to food security was made possible in part by the organization's ideological commitment to the social determinants of health, which encompasses food security issues. The particular choice to dedicate resources to food security was driven by the early involvement of the GRCHC with the Community Garden Project, the relevance of food security as an underlying cause of health issues in the Brantford community, and, finally, by Gill's interest in food security and ability to conduct research into the community food system afforded by her simultaneous employment and education in health promotion.

The GRCHC community food security model also has many transferable success factors relevant for other organizations. Linking food issues to social and public service organizations that are well funded (such as health in this case) can be one way to

overcome the lack of financial sustainability that non-profits and grassroots initiatives often find in trying to employ the necessary staff for a successful food endeavour. Both Gill and Ord emphasized the importance of research – both initiative specific and community specific – that allowed them to build stakeholder relationships in the community, learn about other communities' successes and challenges in similar endeavors, and gain credibility and support for their initiatives both within the community and from the Health Centre.

Finally, Gill stresses the importance of building community capacity for the community to take ownership of its own food endeavours. The GRCHC's most successful food security initiatives (and the model they continue to use with new initiatives) are those where they first initiate a project as a facilitator and administrator, bring together key stakeholders and resources, and provide knowledge and education. Then as the community becomes more involved and confident, the GRCHC's role shifts to one of continued support while the ownership of the initiative is transferred to the community itself. This model balances the need to provide a starting point and a resource base for an initiative to the community with the need for sustainability that can be achieved when the community itself defines an initiative as important and takes charge of maintaining it.

Case Study 2: Good Food Box Network

Location: Hamilton

Interviewees: Karen Burson, co-founder/operator, Crystle Numan, co-founder/operator, Kiera Aynes, volunteer

Phone Interview June 27, 2011 (Lisa Ohberg), Site Visit August 17, 2011 (Lisa Ohberg)

Summary

- Good food box program that grew from supplying a few boxes to a hundred in a few months
- Development trajectory that will include multiple types of boxes targeted at different demographics throughout the food box network
- Developing through a model designed to create financial self-sustainability

Overview

History

Good food box programs try to connect people with healthy, fresh produce at an affordable cost and exist across Ontario. Interested in starting a good food box in Hamilton, Burson conducted research on this model particularly looking at Foodshare's good food box in Toronto. A good food box program had been operating successfully in Hamilton by the Grace Lutheran Church for a many years explains Numan, "but of course they could only serve their area, their vision was not to get much bigger…Grace Lutheran was getting to their capacity for their produce provider and their ability to deliver their boxes". When the food box started, Numan worked at the Welcome Inn

which serves people "who have problems fully purchasing and accessing enough food" through their food bank and so the goals of a food box "very much fit" with her work.

Burson and Numan started the good food box program working on a volunteer basis in January 2011, with the Welcome Inn as one of their "anchor depots", explains Numan, "while writing a grant [application] in order to expand it" under the organizational umbrella of Environment Hamilton, where Burson is employed. Through the process of writing the grant, Burson and Numan developed a bigger concept to include a mechanism in the food box program to allow it to be self-sustaining, as Burson had found in her research that the "sustainability [of the food box program] becomes difficult if its not part of something a little bigger", explains Numan.

The Network

At present the food box is distributed through a few targeted depot locations in the community. The pick up locations correspond with other community services such as the St. Joseph Home Care and the Welcome Inn to target those populations that face challenges accessing enough healthy, fresh produce in a non-stigmatizing way. Customers pay an affordable price for their box, but the entire fee is used to purchase the produce. Staff time, space and other resources are volunteered. The box is distributed monthly, and volunteers meet at a church hall to pack the produce delivered by their supplier and load the boxes into the truck.

Burson and Numan were successful in their grant application and have received a Grant from the Healthy Communities Fund from the Ontario Ministry of Sport and Health Promotion to expand the good food box network. The expansion work will occur over the year 2011-2012 to correspond with the duration of the grant. Burson and Numan hope to include a second good food box that emphasizes locally grown produce. This box will cost more than the standard box to reflect the higher prices required to pay a fair price to local farmers, as well as the premium for receiving a higher percentage of local produce. Pick up locations or depots through which the local boxes will be distributed are intended to be large companies or places of employment in order to target the demographic that is money rich and time poor, so to speak. This box will appeal to the middle working class who would like to support local farmers but do not have the time to shop at farmers' markets or farm gates and cannot find local produce consistently in the supermarket. The higher price charged for the local food box will generate a profit in addition to the price of the produce that can be used to fund the staff time or other necessities to run the food box network.

Burson and Numan would also like to offer a third box, one that would include pre-portioned and prepared servings of produce, targeting time-strapped, health conscious clientele or those who might have difficulty with home food preparation. "In the 'cut up' box," explains Numan, "hopefully we're also going to be able to make that a social enterprise that's going to provide paid work for people" by stimulating the need for this type of food processing capacity in Hamilton.

Human Resources

Burson and Numan themselves are indispensible resources to the food box network. Burson's vision and dedication along with the willingness of both Burson and Numan to dedicate their unpaid time to the food box allowed the project to materialize. In addition, Burson's history as a employee of Environment Hamilton as the coordinator for their Eat Local Hamilton project has meant that she has a large number of contacts in the city relating to local food. Similarly, Numan's work with the Welcome Inn had provided her with many contacts relating to emergency food access. This plethora of community contacts has greatly eased the implementation of the local food box network. Volunteers make the food box possible, as it is volunteers who pack the box each month. The driver also volunteers his time out of support for the food box network and "like-minded thinking" explains Numan.

This summer, the food box network also had the time of Aynes, a Katimavik intern working with the good food box network through her volunteer placement at Environment Hamilton. Aynes had been working to create a website and brochure content that will provide information for potential food box customers relating to how they can purchase a food box and where they can pick it up. The website will also have a "site coordinator's package", explains Numan, "so that people who would like to be depot sites know exactly what they need to do and how to get started".

Originally, Burson and Numan approached the supplier of the food box program run out of Grace Lutheran Church to supply the good food box network. That supplier was at his capacity supplying Grace Lutheran's food box, but referred Burson and Numan to their current supplier, who is a "small scale produce distributor", and who "also understands local food", says Numan. The supplier has made connections to local farms and "understands our desires to have as much local [produce] as possible", says Numan, but also has the capacity to purchase from the Ontario Food Terminal in Toronto if need be. The supplier's existing warehousing capacity and distribution logistics means that the capacity exists for him to "scale up when we need to", explains Numan.

Working with a local supplier enhances and reinforces the increased business the food box will bring to Hamilton. The food box, Numan explains, "is a great way to increase [the supplier's] business by us starting to buy from him, helping and even encouraging him to develop more connections with farmers, [which] means more jobs in Hamilton that are local jobs…we're paying [the supplier] fair value…because we don't want him to go out of business to support this; we want to be supporting local businesses".

Physical and Natural Resources

Currently the food box is packed monthly in St. Luke's Parish Hall in Hamilton. St. Luke's provides the space free of charge for this purpose. The boxes are currently packed in reusable IKEA bags, which are reused for packing and delivering the boxes month to month. Hamilton's soil and climate are favorable to the cultivation of a variety of fresh fruits and vegetables, and is within close proximity of other regions in Southern Ontario that grow produce for a fairly long season. For this reason it is easier for the food box to obtain a variety of fruits and vegetables as well as source a fair amount of it locally. Once

the food boxes are packed, they are delivered to the pick up depots in a truck that belongs to the North Hamilton Welcome Inn for use by its Food Bank to pick up donated food. The truck is not used by the Welcome Inn on Wednesdays, so the boxes are packed and delivered on Wednesdays and pays mileage to the Welcome Inn for the use of its truck to do so.

Financial Resources

Burson and Numan applied for a Grant from the Healthy Communities Fund under Environment Hamilton, the non-profit organization for whom Burson works full-time as the program coordinator for the Eat Local Hamilton project. They were successful and obtained a one-year grant for which payments started in June 2011. The grant funds Burson and Numan's staff time. Numan explains that the Good Food Box is also receiving, "gift in kind time from Trivaris, which is a…business consulting firm that also does social enterprise focuses". Trivaris will work with the Good Food Box Network to help them "develop a business plan for what actually is possible" in order to help them realize their goals to expand the Good Food Box into a network of financially self-sustaining box programs.

Community Resources

"Churches are a great resource," says Numan. St. Luke's parish provides the space for the monthly box packing, free of charge. The Grace Lutheran Church runs a food box "as a ministry, which adds to its sustainability there", explains Numan but which is operating at its capacity. The coordinators of the food box at the church provided knowledge and support when Burson was researching the food box model, sharing their expertise. In addition, their supplier provided the connection between the Good Food Box Network and its current supplier.

The North Hamilton Welcome Inn facilitated connections to other needed community resources through Numan's work with them. The Welcome Inn provides the food box with its truck, for example. St. Luke's Parish Hall is already used for one of the Welcome Inn's community programs, therefore St. Luke's was willing to allow the good food box to use the space as well.

Numan identified that the well established network of community resources in Hamilton was instrumental in the success of the food box: "Hamilton likes to work together, likes to connect and collaborate and there are neighborhood hubs all across the city that are already working and strengthening and being in communities that we just can drop and say, 'would you like to be a drop site [for food box delivery]' and they've got people there that who make it happen."

Policy and Program Resources

The Healthy Communities Fund from the Ontario Ministry of Sport and Health Promotion was a program resource that Burson and Numan were able to tap into through their successful application for a Grant.

Desired Assets

Although the remarkable amount of community connectedness that exists in Hamilton was acknowledged as an asset, Numan expressed a desire to continue to create and further those connections, and strengthen the network of community resources in Hamilton. The Hamilton Good Food Box Network is extremely grateful for the in-kind support provided by St. Luke's parish by allowing them to use their parish hall free of charge for monthly box packing. If the box program were to expand, however, a larger space potentially better equipped to handle food box packing and logistics might be desired.

Constraints/Overcoming Them

When asked about constraints, Numan identified working within a space not ideally suited to food box packing as one: "we need to look at what is the best facility space and how we can get that for a cost that is possible, whether that be in-kind or if we need to pay. The space is not bad, but it has stairs…but we're making it work because for now its very cost effective for us".

The food box network has been operating for a relatively short time (at the time of writing) but with each month the box is distributed, Burson and Numan strive to improve the process and the box: "[their supplier] has been learning with us," says Numan, "of what works and doesn't work in the boxes, what kind of quality is needed, and how to make it the most amount of food that we can get at a quality that is needed". When they received feedback that the clients did not know how to cook a particular fruit or vegetable and thus were not getting their full benefit from the box, they stopped ordering that item.

A continuing challenge is the amount of staff time available to dedicate to the organization of the box. This obstacle was partially overcome by receiving Healthy Communities Fund Grant funds, which secured Burson and Numan's staff time in a part-time paid capacity instead of a volunteer capacity. Even part-time, says Numan, "its hard to make sure that everything is being kept on track and we're still developing our systems and so sometimes there's missteps with ordering or with how many boxes left, and so we're working on double counting, making sure that we have the exact number that needs to go out on the truck."

Successes

The good food box network has grown in a very short time, going from supplying just a few boxes in January 2011 when it started, to approximately a hundred (with monthly fluctuations) six months later. When asked about the successes the food box network has had Numan said, "we've grown, and we've been able to manage it and we've been nimble enough to adjust when people say 'well you really shouldn't put this in the box because nobody knew how to eat it'… so we've been able to adjust and grow." The ability to adapt to the needs of the community is critical in the long-term success of the food box program.

Relevance

When asked what the relevance of the local food box network is to other local food initiatives, Numan emphasized the importance of building and utilizing a supportive

network of community connections and resources. Numan stressed the importance of "building those connections if they're not already there, using them if they are there, and really developing them as much as you can at the beginning so that it's a community box you know, its something that the community is doing".

Secondly, Burson and Numan are striving to create the good food box network in a way that emphasizes "the sustainability piece" in that it has the ability to be financially self-sustaining. Burson's vision of a food box network that offers multiple types of boxes and targets different demographics through depot site choice is one part of the solution. The vision also includes a model for producing revenue that will support the entire endeavour, such as the local food boxes administered through places of work subsidizing the costs of the affordable box, and the pre-portioned box creating stable jobs in processing.

The second way in which Burson and Numan's model for creating the good food box includes "the sustainability piece" is through the creation of a business plan. By working with Trivaris, Burson and Numan will develop a business plan to identify what is feasible within the above-mentioned vision and what the network needs to do for the operation to be financially self-sustaining. "They're [Trivaris] going to be key, I think, for helping us find out what is the sustainability point, and how do we get from where we are to there," says Numan.

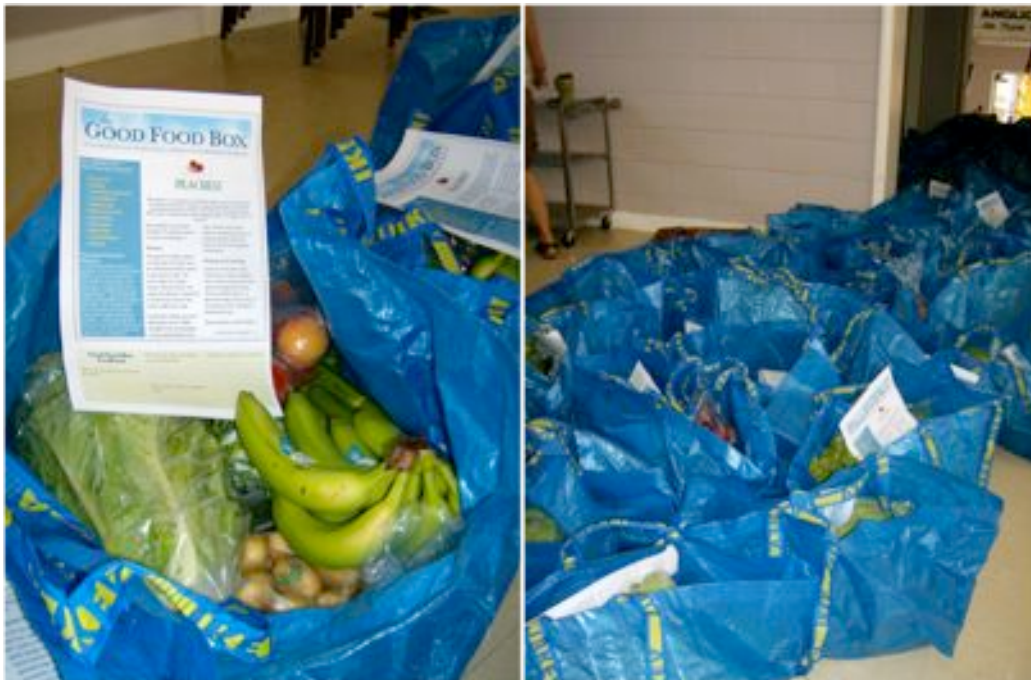

Figure 3.2: Good food box with newsletter (left) and packed food boxes ready to be loaded into the truck! (right)

Case Study 3: Plan B Organic Farm

Location: Hamilton

Interviewees: Alvaro Venturelli, Co-owner/operator; Melanie Golba, Co-owner/operator

Phone Interview August 5th, 2011 (Lisa Ohberg), Site Visit August 16, 2011 (Lisa Ohberg, Sarah Wakefield), Email Correspondence (with Melanie Golba)

Summary

- CSA operating successfully and financially self-sustaining for 13 years
- Short supply chain emphasizing regional trade with small local producers and direct sales to consumers
- Physical distribution and redistribution hub supplying produce from their farm, other small producers, and another producer/re-distributor directly to consumers
- Market only through alternative retail models such as the CSA and farmers' markets

Overview

History

Plan B Organic farm was started 13 years ago by Venturelli and his family. The farm is organized around principles of agro-ecology, and grows certified organic produce. The farm started out small, selling only the produce they grew through a small CSA (community shared agriculture). The operation has expanded in the last decade, and Plan B now acts as a food distribution hub and redistributor as well as a primary producer and direct seller in the system (see the schematic at the end of the document for a relational sketch of the Plan B supply chain). Their organic CSA delivers 700 to 1000 boxes a week, and includes produce from their farm as well as a number of other small producers in Southern Ontario and, in the off-season, organic produce imported (through Pfennings, see below) from warmer climates.

The Supply Chain

Plan B is involved in every stage of the agri-food supply chain for fresh produce; their "grower supply chain is a chain but a short one", explains Venturelli. The farm grows its own produce, and purchases produce from Pfennings Organic Farm (a farm, importer and redistributor of organic produce in Southern Ontario) as well as from small producers directly. Purchased produce and the majority of produce grown on Plan B is used to supply the CSA boxes distributed weekly to Plan B's 700 – 1000 customers. A small portion of the produce grown at Plan B is sold fresh at three farmers' markets in the area, and any leftovers are sold back to Pfennings, which does not sell direct to customers but to the retail market, supplying grocers such as Fiesta Foods. (See the schematic at the end of the document for a diagram of the Plan B supply chain.)

The CSA has "37 [pick-up depot locations] in the Golden Horseshoe", explains Venturelli, as well as a home delivery option for an additional fee. The delivery fee in the past was the same regardless of the customer's location, but is now differentiated based

on proximity zones, to reflect the rising cost of fuel. The routes taken by Plan B's driver are carefully planned to be as efficient as possible, delivering boxes to depots and hitting home deliveries on the way back, for example "in a very tight route", says Venturelli. Since the driver is not going out of his way to make home deliveries, the transportation fees actually make home delivery a very economical choice for Plan B, providing the income to cover transportation costs for all deliveries.

Human Resources

Plan B operates as a business partnership, with Venturelli, his wife and his brother running the farm. His parents were important resources in providing a lot of the start up capital to build the farm 13 years ago. These family-business relationships have been fundamental in operating the farm successfully. In addition to the stable dedication of the Venturelli family, Plan B relies on the labor of 1.5 to 2 full-time staff positions, as well as 5-6 seasonal laborers made up of waged workers, volunteers and interns. Interns sometimes receive different compensation depending on the program within which they intern at the farm. Some are unpaid interns, sometimes second year interns receive a salary, and student interns from the local high school program require minimum wage.

Venturelli admits that the interns can at times be considered "underpaid to an extent" but at the same time the interns gain valuable education through their placement at the farm and are sometimes interning to fulfill the requirements of a certification program. The interns are also provided room and board on the farm during the working season. These relationships highlight the complexity of labor questions on a farm. Interns are not the highest paid workers in the economy and often work long hours, and labor costs (such as minimum wage) continue to rise, but vegetable farmers are unable to charge more for their produce to recoup these costs. Venturelli's strategy to address this question has been to try to "build [full time] positions as the business grows and make those stable conditions…to have a stable workforce" made up of fewer interns and more full-time workers.

Physical Resources

Plan B has a warehouse on premises as well as two houses, in addition to a van and a truck for deliveries. A quarter of the warehouse space is used for packing CSA boxes, and the rest is used for storage, both of Plan B's produce and some of the produce purchased from small producers. Warehouse space is a critical resource in this supply chain. It allows Plan B to purchase crops from small producers who lack warehouse space, and store them until they can be used in the CSA boxes. This benefits the small producers as Plan B can often offer them a better price than major wholesalers (who might be able to purchase a comparable quantity). Pfennings's extensive warehouse space is a resource that benefits both small producers and Plan B, which purchases from Pfennings and sells surplus from their farm back to Pfennings when they have it. As the Venturellis and many of the seasonal workers live on the premises, two houses is also an important physical resource.

Natural Resources

Plan B had an analysis done of their farm's agricultural resources to evaluate which crops they could grow most efficiently given their climate, soil and water resources. Their

strengths include having “some labor, good water, decent soil” says Venturelli . In addition, they practice an agro-ecological farming method that builds natural fertility cycles in their soil. They have used the results of this assessment to focus on growing what thrives given the resources they have available (including annual vegetables, garlic, onions, cooking greens and carrots), which is better for the soil, and more efficient. Their partnerships with other small farmers in the area and Pfennings allow them to fill in the gaps of what they do not grow themselves for the CSA. In this system, producers grow what is most efficient for them to grow, and through regional trade achieve the sufficient variety to attract and hold enough CSA customers to be profitable.

Financial Resources

In 1997, when Alvaro & Melanie decided they wanted to start an organic farm but had no way to start that, they created a summer youth project called "Plan B Organic Farms". They received a $150,000 HRDC grant from the Canadian government through a Youth Entrepreneurship program for that project that paid themselves and 6 youth for the season to learn how to run a small CSA farm. With the grant, they hired a mentor farmer, each youth received a $200 stipend/week, and they paid for a business training course. Venturelli’s parents also contributed funding for the farm. The first season, Plan B sold 75 shares and used those funds to purchase a walking rototiller, seeds, row covers, and the hand tools needed.

Aside from the initial funding for start-up costs, Plan B has not received any additional funding. The operation is completely financially self-sustaining. The operation, “became financially viable at around 500 to 600 shares”, explains Venturelli, and they have been able to expand to 700 to 1000 shares at present through positive press and word of mouth. Customers purchase shares at the beginning of the season, and they guarantee the farm a market and a set price for their product. In addition, the share system allows Plan B to know in advance exactly how much produce they will need, allowing them to “grow only what we need” and reduce losses, explains Venturelli. The success of the CSA has been the key to Plan B’s sustainability.

Community Resources

Plan B “partner[s] with about probably twenty-two growers, [and] also Pfennings…to be that culturally appropriate box”, says Venturelli. When the CSA first started, Plan B actually lost customers because as Venturelli explains, “people have habits which are everybody goes to the store…[and we] couldn’t provide people with culturally appropriate [variety]” that they had come to expect from the experience of shopping at supermarkets. In order to achieve variety in their product that would allow them to maintain enough customers to be profitable, Plan B “started to work with other farmers in southern Ontario to create our own food system”, Venturelli explains.

To supplement their own produce in the CSA boxes, Plan B buys directly from small producers specializing in products that Plan B cannot grow as efficiently, as well as from Pfennings, and include some imported organic produce. These community business partnerships are mutually beneficial relationships; Plan B can often provide small farmers with a better price than what a wholesaler is willing to offer, and the box variety achieved by so many suppliers keeps Plan B in business.

Good press from the CSA customers and word of mouth in the community have helped Plan B expand its customer base and exceed the number of shares needed to break even. Plan B used to rely heavily on CSA customers outside of Hamilton (in Toronto for example) for income, but positive press from customers within the Hamilton community has recently allowed them to secure the support of more customers in their own community.

Policy and Program Resources

Venturelli has found that there is not a lot of funding for interns. As mentioned earlier, Plan B also received some of its initial funding through the Youth Entrepreneurship program, which they used to train under an organic farmer and grow their first season of shares. Golba expressed a need for policy and program resources that specifically addressed the needs of small-scale fresh fruit and vegetable producers:

> I think there is a need for organization and funding of fresh vegetable/fruit producers, especially small scale. What we need is access to funds precisely for capital purchases to develop the very costly infrastructure needed on farms that handle fresh produce. Small vegetable farms need proper cold storage facility, refrigerated delivery vehicles, and also develop proper kitchen space on farm for value added production. These 3 key things, if small farms could have help with access to funding to develop these [they] would be doing much better and we would see more of them survive in this market.

Desired Assets

Venturelli expressed a desire to have a multi-level policy environment more supportive of small farmers and biological organic production methods, which, he says, “are the only way you ever build soil”. At present the market concentration by large corporate farming operations is preventing small producers from accessing consumer markets. “One of the barriers to instituting a local food system,” he says, “is that we don’t have access to markets as local farmers.”

Venturelli explains how broad trends in global agriculture are affecting local producers and regionalization efforts: “the biggest issues are seeds, water, and land and whether or not small holders and people are allowed to just live. Three quarters of the world still feed themselves and small scale agriculture is feeding most of the world”, but “alternative land use pressures” and corporate “market concentration” threaten the livelihoods of small farmers everywhere.

Constraints/Overcoming Them

Venturelli emphasized the constraints facing small producers in Ontario because of the dominance of large corporate farms monopolizing access to markets and government programs. Plan B overcame this constraint in part by obtaining start-up capital for the farm through social equity; his parents put their life’s savings into the farm.

When they first started out, Plan B's CSA consisted only of produce they grew themselves. They lost customers after a season because they could not meet the demand for variety and diversity in this way. The regional trade partnership supply chain model they devised to overcome this barrier has been incredibly successful for several reasons. Firstly, the partnership allows each participant to be most efficient, growing what is suitable to the resources they have without being dwarfed by large corporate operations or global competition. Secondly, the partnership benefits the small producers Plan B (and Pfennings) purchase from because the storage space of the latter two allows them to purchase large quantities and provide a fairer price than competing wholesalers. Thirdly, the variety and diversity that Plan B can now offer its customers retains their customers' business and allows them to serve enough customers to be self-sustaining.

Successes

When asked to share some of the successes that Plan B has had Venturelli responded that they've "managed to build a farm at a time where farms are going out of business, managed to do it organically, [and] managed to give people better prices [although they can't always guarantee that] both for the farmers and for the consumers".

Relevance

When Venturelli was asked why Plan B has managed to be successful despite the constraints faced and the hostile socio-economic environment for small producers, he identified four main transferable business strategies: i. diversity afforded by regional trade partnerships, ii. non-speculative production, iii. access to social equity, and iv. knowing and exceeding the break-even point in sales.

"We had [customers] abandon us when it was us alone as a CSA", says Venturelli, because Plan B alone could not provide customers with the variety and diversity of produce that they expect. Purchasing from small local producers and Pfennings Organic Farm allows Plan B to secure a greater variety of produce for CSA customers and in turn retain those customers. It also allows each producer to grow the mix of crops that is most efficient for them to produce based on their available resources and microclimate.

The CSA model allows Plan B to practice non-speculative production, since customers sign up for shares ahead of time, explains Venturelli; "we know what we're growing and for who". By not growing any more than they need, they reduce waste. Access to social equity when starting the operation was critical in allowing the farm to obtain the start up capital they needed, says Venturelli, "if my father and mother hadn't put their life's earnings into this farm it wouldn't be here," adding that, "banks laughed at us". Banks and agricultural programs will not accept mortgages for farmers below a certain sales threshold, making access to capital a very difficult hurdle for small producers to overcome. Accessing social equity was the only way for Plan B to overcome this barrier in their formative years.

The farm is now financially self-sustaining; "we have been earning our money from growing vegetables and selling vegetables," says Venturelli. The key was to identify what the break-even point was to recoup the costs of operating; explains Venturelli, "we became financially viable at around 500 to 600 shares, and are now at 700 to 1000" with

more shares in the summer season than winter. Being able to offer customers variety in their box as well as a good price are two points that have allowed Plan B to retain enough customers to be self-sustaining. Another is good press in the local media and advertising through word of mouth.

Figure 3.3: From left: mixed colour carrots; a field of freshly cultivated green beans; and a fall share

Case Study 4: FoodShare

Prepared by Fiona Yeudall and Bronwyn Whyte

Location: 90 Croatia St., Toronto, ON
Website: www.foodshare.net

Interviewee: Debbie Field (Executive Director), with additional information provided by Robyn Shyllit (Communications Co-ordinator)

Initial interview by Bronwyn Whyte

Summary

- Canada's largest food security organization, founded in 1985 to address hunger and food system sustainability in Toronto communities
- Long-term approach rooted in universal programs, community development partnerships and social enterprise with a strong social justice focus
- Pioneered the *Good Food Box* and its distribution model with 40 boxes in 1992, now reaching more than 4000 families monthly
- Multi-sectoral food centre reaches over 155,000 children and adults monthly with programs including direct fresh produce access, childhood nutrition and education, urban agriculture and community cooking and skill development

Organizational Overview

"FoodShare is a Toronto non-profit that works at the grassroots level to build a food system that is both just and environmentally sustainable. They run a program for every link in the food chain, from the growing (they oversee an urban farm on the grounds of the Centre for Addition and Mental Health that produces vegetables for sale at farmers' market), to the processing (they offer small food-business start-ups access to industrial kitchens), to distribution (their Good Food Box program provides fresh fruits and vegetables to people of all economic backgrounds who subscribe)" (Elton, 2010).

FoodShare works to empower individuals, families and communities through food-based initiatives and advocates for supportive public policies. Their programs now reach over 155,000 children and adults across the City of Toronto. Current activities can be traced to recommendations in a 1985 City of Toronto Executive Committee Report that established FoodShare to address food poverty. In addition to provision of space and telephone infrastructure, and pilot funding of $40,000 in the first year, the report recommended formation of a steering committee that included the Medical Officer of Health and agencies leading the fight against hunger. Many of the recommendations resonate today, reflecting demands for physical and economic access to safe, healthy food for all citizens, increased information on the foods we eat, and alternative, more sustainable food systems.

Emergency Food Access: The first mandated activity was to establish the volunteer-operated *Hunger Hotline* to serve citizens seeking emergency food assistance. In 1997 it became the *Foodlink Hotline* and also provided information about community gardens,

Good Food Box stops and other community food programs. It now operates in partnership with *211 Toronto*, which provides information services citywide and answers calls outside of FoodShare hours.

Social Enterprise Food Hub: In 1992, the *Field to Table Traveling Food Truck* began, inspired by Brazilian Sacalo Markets' focus on fresh produce and universal program delivery model. In 1994 it became the *Good Food Box*, one of FoodShare's best known and most replicated programs. From an initial 40 boxes, today more than 4,000 boxes are distributed monthly to 200 neighbourhood drops. Produce is purchased from 25 local family farms and the Ontario Food Terminal. The centralized buying and coordination provides cost and time savings to customers, and benefits from subsidies for infrastructure costs through grants to FoodShare. *Bulk Fresh Produce to Schools and Agencies* was established to meet demand for quality produce in student nutrition programs in 1994. In 2005, *Good Food Markets* began selling high quality, affordable produce in underserved neighbourhoods, where farmers' markets were not likely to be economically viable. In 2012, in partnership with Nishnawbe Aski Nation, the *Fort Albany Good Food Market* began supplying high quality produce sourced from FoodShare's warehouse that travels by truck, train and plane to reach the northern Ontario community. Since 2012, the *Mobile Good Food Market* has been selling quality, affordable produce in neighbourhoods with limited access to fresh produce. FoodShare promotes buying local as the best way to support a resilient local food economy and, for social justice and individual health reasons, also sources imported produce.

School Food and Food Literacy: Since 1992 as a founding member of the *Coalition for Student Nutrition* in 1992, FoodShare has been on the front lines advocating for universal school nutrition programs. FoodShare led the Community Development Team of *Toronto Partners for Student Nutrition* in 1998, a partnership with Toronto Public Health, local School Boards, their Foundations and community agencies. The partnership supports over 685 programs serving approximately 144 000 healthy, nutritious meals and snacks to school age children and youth each school day. Since 2002, FoodShare's *Salad Bar*, adapted from California's program, has worked with schools to provide students a lunch of cut-up vegetables, fruit, proteins and carbohydrates. Launched in 2006, *Field to Table Schools* promotes food literacy using curriculum linked hands-on activities and workshops for students from JK-12. The *Good Food Café*, in operation since 2010, is a healthy lunch program for middle and high school students pioneered in Toronto's French School Boards that demonstrates students taste buds are the not the barrier to healthy food. *Field to Table FoodShare Academy* was launched in 2012 as a social enterprise whereby educators and community members pay a fee for training workshops.

Urban Agriculture: The *Community Garden Program* established in 1989 became the *Urban Agriculture Program* as activities expanded. A rooftop demonstration garden was added to the Eastern Avenue Field to Table Centre in 1997, joined by midscale composting and beekeeping in 2000. *Community Food Animation*, in partnership with AfriCan Food Basket, the Stop Community Food Centre and Second Harvest, started with funding from the City of Toronto in 2004 and still facilitates projects in Toronto Community Housing, Co-op Housing buildings and Toronto Parks. *Market Gardens*, producing at a larger scale, started in 2002 at the Centre for Addiction and Mental

Health's Sunshine Garden, and most recently includes the Bendale Business and Technical Institute. Demonstration community and school food gardens, a greenhouse and midscale composting can be found at FoodShare's current location at 90 Croatia Street.

Kitchens & Cooking: Since its inception, FoodShare promoted *Community Kitchens*. The *Baby Nutrition/Healthy Babies Eat Home-Cooked Food Program* started in 1996, and provides support to new parents to make baby food from scratch. *Cooking out of the Box* started in 2004 to provide easy and delicious recipes for the contents of the *Good Food Box*, and was joined by *Good Food for Life* in 2005 and *Kate's Kitchen* in 2006, with recipes for meals for women living with breast cancer during chemotherapy, radiation and recovery. In 2011, in partnership with Aboriginal organizations, *Community Kitchens was established* with an emphasis on diabetes prevention and outreach to youth and parents. *Field to Table Catering* began in 1996 as a social enterprise providing healthy, affordable meals while the *Toronto Kitchen Incubator* offers a well-equipped professional facility to individuals or groups at affordable rental rates. Since 1998, the *Power Soup Project* has prepared and provided thousands of cups of tasty and nutrient dense soups at a subsidized price, or free of charge, to local shelters in the winter.

Focus on Food Training: Provincial funding in 1995 was a catalyst for the establishment of the *Focus on Women Food Training*, followed by the federally-funded *Focus on Youth*. The latter equips youth who are marginalized by systemic inequalities with skills to help navigate the employment and community sector. Ten youth interns work full-time for six months in the *Kitchen* or *Good Food Warehouse* and build skills through on-the-job learning, mentoring, workshops and training.

Human Resources

Starting with one half-time staff in 1985, FoodShare now employs 62 full-time staff. The organization is committed to non-discrimination and conflict resolution personnel policies that encourage staff training and capacity building. The organization's goal is operational excellence through efficiency of operation and strong customer service while providing a healthy workplace for all staff. Community impacts are multiplied through hundreds of volunteer hours. FoodShare creates meaningful opportunities for community, corporate and student volunteers to contribute to fostering civic engagement and capacity building.

Physical Infrastructure

FoodShare has always operated in government-owned spaces. FoodShare's first home was a City-owned building on Shuter Street, then at 238 Queen Street West (1992), followed by a City-owned warehouse on Parliament (1995). The *Field to Table Centre* was established in 1996 in a provincially-owned abandoned warehouse at Eastern Avenue as an integrated food distribution hub with an industrial kitchen, mid-scale composting facility, Toronto's first urban beehives, meeting rooms and offices. When FoodShare was housed in two locations (238 Queen and 200 Eastern), it was apparent how crucial it is to have the entire organization under one roof. In 2006, the organization moved to an underutilized Toronto District School Board property at 90 Croatia.

Lunch is provided to staff as an employee benefit, paid for by each department, in recognition of the value of healthy eating and networking among staff, volunteers and visitors. The organization has outgrown its space at 90 Croatia, and is seeking a permanent home to house expanded food distribution, composting, kitchen programming, networking and special events. In terms of community infrastructure, FoodShare's food distribution programs have benefited from access to the Ontario Food Terminal (OFT), where FoodShare's buyer gains access to the highest quality produce, both local and imported, at the best wholesale prices.

Financial Resources

FoodShare's operating budget has grown from $40 000 in 1985 to almost $6 million by 2012. Major government funding has acted as a catalyst for increased activities, including 1989's Food Action Project (City of Toronto), 1995's Focus on Food (Federal), 2004's Community Food Animators (City of Toronto) and 2008's Student Nutrition funding (Provincial). Foundation funds have also been key, including Atkinson Foundation's Food 2002 funding, and Sprott Foundation funding beginning in 2009. In 2010, FoodShare identified the need for its own dedicated fundraising event, and hosted the first *Recipe for Change*, an event including more than 30 top chefs, coupled with local beverage partners. Third Party events at Quince (2011), Ontario Food Terminal (Fresh Fest 2012), and St. Lawrence Market South (2012) have become important sources of revenue.

FoodShare has developed a successful sustainable funding model with a third of its annual budget coming from income-generating programs (produce, catering, honey, compost, cookbook and manuals), a third from Foundations, a sixth from government and a sixth from private donors. FoodShare accepts donations from individuals and companies, but only enters into co-branded partnerships with like-minded corporations approved by the Board of Directors.

Community Resources

Active engagement in networks and coalitions has been a key factor of FoodShare's success. The initial steering committee was a coalition of community organizations and government agencies, and FoodShare has continued to provide leadership and support to many local coalitions, regularly working with partners to host workshops, conferences and training sessions. At the municipal level, FoodShare is active in Toronto Public Health and Toronto District School Board committees and supported the 1991 creation of the Toronto Food Policy Council. Engagement with university researchers and students has been facilitated through funding, and participation in the Food for Talk and its predecessor seminar series. Coalition activities have focused on school food at the provincial level, and Food Secure Canada and the Canadian Association for Food Studies at the national level.

Desired Assets

To achieve the goal of society putting 'food first' and prioritizing healthy, affordable, sustainably-produced and local food, creation of a Minister of Food Security and funding for a National Student Nutrition Program by the Federal government is encouraged. More investment is needed at all levels of government for food programs, hubs and

centres, including physical spaces to house them. Growing consensus that a local food system centered on food access in Ontario needs to be supported with infrastructure investment to support local food procurement, particularly for schools. A Food Justice strategy to combat the current food system's exclusion and discrimination against First Nations, Inuit and Metis, immigrants, low income and communities of colour is also required.

Constraints

FoodShare, like the rest of the food movement in Canada, is constrained by limited resources. To combat this, stable funding, including access to affordable space, is needed in response to community need. A key challenge for the future is how FoodShare can balance its historic focus of working in low income and marginalized communities and schools - those who currently do not have adequate access to healthy food - while, at the same time, implementing its vision of Good Healthy Food for All.

Successes

FoodShare's Food Hub at 90 Croatia is both a successful non-profit food distribution centre, selling $2 million in produce annually, and a warm and inviting food centre,where people of all backgrounds get involved in programs, volunteering, sharing meals and building a food movement for change. FoodShare believes that expanded funding and revenue streams and having a common physical space have been essential. Strong community relationships and partnerships are valued as central to success, whether it be a local school program or a Good Food Box stop. FoodShare honours the community leaders who make those projects happen on a daily basis and sees its role as supporting these communities.

Relevance

FoodShare has successfully pioneered community-based food programs. Valuing a community development model, FoodShare readily shares their experiences and lessons learned so other communities can adapt them to their local reality. The first Ontario group involved in community gardens and kitchens, FoodShare pioneered the *Good Food Box* and *Healthy Babies Eat Home-Cooked Food* Programs, and supported others in starting their own community-specific programs with manuals and open-sourced dissemination models. One third of annual operating revenues are generated by Social Enterprises. Among the first to be involved in *Student Nutrition* programs, FoodShare recommended a universal, as opposed to targeted, charity approach to feeding children, and *Field to Table Schools*' food literacy student engagement approach is increasingly seen as the model in Ontario. Committed to Social Justice and a Dismantling Racism perspective, FoodShare suggests program models in which communities lead programs. From the beginning, FoodShare has employed *Propositional* as well as *Oppositional* strategies - on the one hand creating programs such as the *Good Food Box* that improve people's access to healthy food now through subsidized food distribution while, at the same time, opposing cuts to social assistance and growing income disparity.

References

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